

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SOFIA 1384

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM, CVIS, BU, US
SUBJECT: DISCUSSION OF DIVIDED FAMILY CASES

REF: A) SOFIA 1064; B) SOFIA 798; C) SOFIA 701

1. ON JULY 7 CONOFF MET WITH BORIS POPOV, MFA CONSULAR DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL DEALING WITH DIVIDED FAMILY AND HUMANITARIAN CASES TO DISCUSS THE EMBASSY'S CURRENT LIST OF DIVIDED FAMILY CASES. AT OUTSET POPOV REFERRED TO LIST PROVIDED MFA BY AMBASSADOR GARTHOFF ON APRIL 27 (REF B) AND STATED HIS INTENTION TO GIVE DEFINITE GOB RESPONSE TO CASES ON LIST. IN HIS OPENING REMARKS POPOV ALSO TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY TO MENTION THE KOLEVA CASE AS ONE IN WHICH THE EMBASSY HAD TAKEN AN IMPROPER INTEREST SINCE THE CASE INVOLVES ONLY BULGARIAN CITIZENS (SEPTEL). CONOFF REPLIED THAT EMBASSY INTERVENTION PREDICATED BY EXPRESSIONS OF HUMANITARIAN CONCERN BY US CONGRESSMEN AND OTHER US CITIZENS. AS INDICATED SEPTEL, POPOV STATED THAT IN HIS OPINION FURTHER DELAY IN THE COURT PROCEEDING WAS UNLIKELY AND THAT THE FAMILY HAS HAD SUFFICIENT TIME TO TRY TO WORK OUT AN AMICABLE SOLUTION TO THE CASE.

2. POPOV PREFACED HIS REVIEW OF THE LIST WITH OBSERVATIONS
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TO THE EFFECT THAT (1) US LIST INCLUDED MANY CASES WHICH COULD NOT BE CONSIDERED DIVIDED FAMILY OR HUMANITARIAN CASES, AND IN FACT INCLUDED SOME CASES WHICH ARE CONSIDERED BY THE GOB TO INVOLVE CRIMINALS, (2) DEPUTY CHIEF OF MFA CONSULAR DEPARTMENT KOVACHEV HAD CLEARLY STATED (REFS A AND C) GOB POSITION ON DIVIDED FAMILY QUESTION TO ALL INTERESTED PARTIES (I.E., TO US AND TO OTHER WESTERN EMBASSIES IN SOFIA),

(3) GOB DEFINITION OF FAMILY FORMS BASIS FOR CONSIDERATION OF CASES ON LIST AS "DIVIDED FAMILY" CASES, AND (4) GOB RESPONSE TO EMBASSY LIST OF APRIL 27 WOULD CONSTITUTE FINAL GOB DECISION IN EACH CASE WITH NO FURTHER DISCUSSION POSSIBLE. IN RESPONSE TO QUERY, POPOV DID ALLOW THAT, IN RARE INSTANCES, SOME CASES MIGHT BE REVIEWED A SECOND TIME.

3. IN DISCUSSION OF DIVIDED FAMILY CASES CONOFF CONTESTED NARROW GOB DEFINITION OF "FAMILY," AND EMPHASIZED THAT THE US GOVERNMENT DID NOT ACCEPT GOB DEFINITION AS BASIS FOR DETERMINING CASES IN WHICH THE EMBASSY COULD APPROPRIATELY EXPRESS AN INTEREST. CONOFF OUTLINED THE EVOLUTION OF THE DIVIDED FAMILY ISSUE AND REITERATED US PERCEPTION THAT RESOLUTION OF ISSUE NOT BE VIEWED IN TERMS OF SET LISTS BUT RATHER IN THE CONTINUED PROGRESS IN RESOLVING OLD CASES AS WELL AS NEW CASES THAT MIGHT ARISE. CONOFF EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT THERE WILL COME A TIME WHEN THERE WILL BE NO REMAINING CASES AT ISSUE. CONOFF ENDEAVORED TO EDUCATE POPOV AS TO THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DEPARTMENT'S DOMESTIC CONSTITUENCY, SPECIFICALLY THE CONGRESS, AND NOTED THE GREAT CONGRESSIONAL INTEREST IN HUMANITARIAN AND DIVIDED FAMILY CASES.

4. POPOV THEN REVIEWED APRIL 27 LIST CASE BY CASE. HE DEFERRED COMMENT ON THOSE CASES WHICH, ACCORDING TO BULGARIAN DEFINITION OF FAMILY, DID NOT INVOLVE DIVIDED FAMILITES AND, CONFIDENTIAL

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THUS, WERE NOT CONSIDERED BY GOB TO BE HUMANITARIAN CASES. IN EACH SUCH INSTANCE CONOFF EXPRESSED US INTEREST IN CASE AND REQUESTED ELABORATION AS TO REASONS FOR CONTINUED DENIAL. POPOV RESPONDED IN MOST CASES THAT THE INDIVIDUALS CONCERNED HAD THE RITHT TO APPLY FOR PASSPORTS THROUGH NORMAL PROCEDURES AND THAT "MOST WILL BE PERMITTED TO TRAVEL". RANGE OF GOB DECISIONS INCLUDED FIVE CASES WHERE APPROVAL HAD NOW BEEN GRANTED (KERANOVA, S. ANDREEVA, KHASANOV, K. NIKOLOVA, AND TCHOLAKOVA) AND THREE CASES DEFINITELY REFUSED (ATSEVA, KALCHEV AND INKIOW). (ANOTHER CASE, THAT OF MARIA PETROVA, WAS PARTIALLY RESOLVED PRIOR TO PRESENTATION OF APRIL LIST. MRS. PETROVA'S PASS-PORT APPLICATION WAS APPROVED IN JANUARY THOUGH HER DAUGHTER ASYA WAS REFUSED A PASSPORT AT THAT TIME.) THE REMAINING CASES FALL INTO THE CATEGORIES OF "SEPARATE FAMILY" OR

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"INSUFFICIENT INFORMATION" WHICH, AS INDICATED ABOVE, MAY
EVENTUALLY BE APPROVED FOR TRAVEL. EMBASSY DOES NOT BELIEVE
THIS INITIAL MFA RESPONSE PROVIDES US SUFFICIENT BASIS TO
ESTIMATE GOB POLICY ON RESOLVING OTHER OUTSTANDING CASES.
THE COMING MONTH SHOULD REVEAL GOB ATTITUDE TOWARD THOSE
CASES CONSIDERED BY GOB TO BE SEPARATE FAMILIES,

5. NOTABLE OMISSION IN POPOV'S PREPARED REMARKS ON INDIVIDUAL CASES WAS ABSENCE OF SPECIFIC DECISIONS IN EITHER THE MLADENOV OR SLAVOVA CASES. IN NEITHER CASE DID POPOV ADDRESS THE DIFFICULTIES INVOLVED, I.E., THE ELDER MLADENOV BOY'S ATTEMPTED ESCAPE FROM THE BULGARIAN ARMY, AND THE FACT THAT SLAVOV IS ABROAD ILLEGALLY. IT APPEARS THEY FAILED TO DO A THOROUGH JOB OF REVIEWING EACH INDIVIDUAL CASE OMOLIST. CONOFF PRESENTED US VIEW OF THESE CASES, CITING BOTH OUR HUMANITARIAN CONCERN FOR THE TWO DIVIDED FAMILIES AS WELL AS THE GREAT CONGRESSIONAL INTEREST IN EACH CASE. IN REVIEWING SLAVOVA CASE CONOFF RECOUNTED FOR POPOV'S BENEFIT DETAILS OF SLAVOVA'S PROBLEM IN MAKING A PASSPORT APPLICATION AND CALLED POPOV'S ATTENTION TO THE EMBASSY'S STILL UNANSWERED VERBAL NOTE OF FEBRUARY 20 TO MFA REGARDING THE SLAVOVA CASE, LISTING THE NAMES OF THE CONGRESSMEN WHO HAD EXPRESSED INTEREST IN CASE BOTH BEFORE AND AFTER THE PREPARATION OF THE FEBRUARY NOTE. POPOV'S ONLY RESPONSE TO CONOFF REMARKS ABOUT SLAVOVA CASE WAS THAT IN THE FUTURE HE THOUGHT THE EMBASSY SHOULD AVOID THE
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USE OF FORMAL NOTES BECAUSE IT MADE THINGS MORE DIFFICULT (FOR MFA). CONOFF SUGGESTED THAT A SUBSEQUENT MEETING BE ARRANGED IN THE NEAR FUTURE TO DISCUSS AGAIN THE CASES ABOUT WHICH POPOV HAD NO INFORMATION, AS WELL AS NEW CASES OF WHICH THE EMBASSY HAS BECOME AWARE SINCE APRIL. POPOV WAS AMENABLE TO FOLLOW-UP MEETING AND AGREED TO MEET WITH

CONOFF AT A LATER DATE. WE PLAN TO SEEK APPOINTMENT IN TWO WEEKS TO CONTINUE DISCUSSIONS OF UNRESOLVED CASES AND TO RAISE NEW CASES AS APPROPRIATE.

6. EMBASSY IN PROCESS OF PREPARING COMPLETE ANALYSIS OF GOB RESPONSE TO APRIL LIST FOR DEPARTMENT'S INFORMATION AND WILL ATTEMPT TO CONTACT SPONSORS IN US AS NECESSARY SO THAT ALL INDIVIDUALS NOT DEFINITELY REFUSED IN POPOV'S PRESENTATION MAY BE PROVIDED WITH AFFIDAVITS OF SUPPORT FOR NEW PASSPORT APPLICATIONS. EMBASSY AND DEPARTMENT SHOULD ENDEAVOR TO MONITOR CLOSELY SUBSEQUENT GOB HANDLING OF APPLICATIONS OF THOSE CASES REMAINING ON THE APRIL LIST. EMBASSY ANALYSIS WILL ATTEMPT TO INCLUDE INFORMATION ON ALL NEW CASES WHICH HAVE DEVELOPED SINCE APRIL SO THAT TRUE DIMENSIONS OF CASELOAD CAN BE DETERMINED. EMBASSY REVIEW OF LIST TO FOLLOW BY SEPTEL.
GARTHOFF

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